

News Release

Poinsettias are in Bloom at U of M Crookston Greenhouses

By Itolleks on Wednesday, December 3, 2014

There were 700 rooted poinsettia cuttings that arrived in August at the University of Minnesota Crookston in anticipation of another holiday season. Under the skill and coaxing of students involved in the commercial floriculture class, those cuttings develop into a beautiful poinsettia crop.

This year's poinsettias create a beautiful and colorful display with their showy "flowers" known as bracts and include varieties such as Christmas Feelings Marble, Cortez Electric Fire, Enduring Pink, Enduring White, Freedom Early Marble, Freedom Early Red, Freedom Early White, Prestige Maroon, and Prestige Red.

Members of the fall semester class include: Riley Bell, a senior majoring in Natural Resources Park Management from Laurens, Iowa; Justin Goodroad, a senior majoring in horticulture from Lindstrom, Minn.; and Sarah Lanners, a senior majoring in horticulture from Nashwauk, Minn.



In October, students started the process of forcing the plants to induce bract color in time for the holiday season in December. Following a specific procedure to control the light, the students covered the plants with a dark cloth at 4 p.m. and uncovered them at 8 a.m. each day to regulate the length of daylight the plants receive. The students are responsible for greenhouse chores on the weekends as well. Although the class is taught by Theresa Helgeson, the crop is in the hands of the students. The work and production of the poinsettia crop is entirely the responsibility of the class. Helgeson says, "My goal is to give our students a truthful hands on experience. If they are going to make a mistake, we want them to do it here and learn from it. Lessons such as these, are never forgotten."

The Agriculture and Natural Resources Department offers commercial floriculture as part of the horticulture program to teach students to produce quality plants for a specific date - a skill necessary for employment in a greenhouse or garden center. "Poinsettias form their colored bracts, when the amount of light is regulated," explains Helgeson. "The poinsettia really doesn't have a blossom like most flowers. Instead, the colorful red, pink, or white petals are modified leaves known as bracts. The blossoms are actually the small yellowish clusters in the center."

Helgeson often allows problems to develop to see how the students will solve them--something they would have to do in an employment situation and giving them an opportunity to apply what they have learned. The class demands hard work, dedication, and a strong team effort to grow the best poinsettias. Leadership, responsibility and strong problem solving skills are three of the qualities that develop in this type of teaching and learning environment.

"Students learn so much from applying their classroom learning to real-world experience," Helgeson explains. "By taking responsibility for the crop, the students are accountable for the outcome making the commercial floriculture class one of the most memorable for the students." The class is excellent training for a career in horticulture, a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S.

To learn more about the horticulture program with emphases in environmental landscaping, production horticulture or urban forestry, visit www.UMCrookston.edu/academics.

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